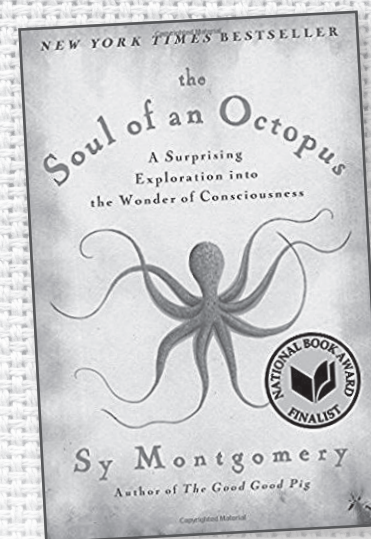


Discussion Questions (Source: Simon and Schuster)

1. Sy Montgomery writes about her scientific and emotional attraction to octopuses. Did anything surprise you in her poetic, sensuous language about the octopuses? Does she make clear what science cannot explain about octopuses?
2. How does Montgomery describe the different personalities that the octopuses have? Do you agree with her assessments of their attributes? Can you relate to the emotions that she interprets them to have?
3. Otherness is a central issue in the book—the otherness of the octopus with its nature so dramatically different from that of other mollusks as well as the differences between cephalopods and people. How does Montgomery use the otherness of the octopus to show the ways the human characters in the story can feel that they don't fit in or belong? How do the human characters with their varied backgrounds find ways of coming together and belonging?
4. The similarities between octopuses and humans are another theme. What are the similarities that Montgomery sees? Would you share her point of view or do you see the differences more than the similarities?
5. What does Montgomery reveal about what constitutes consciousness, in humans and animals? Does she show that octopuses have consciousness?
6. Does Montgomery address and answer the question of whether an octopus can have a soul? If so, how does she show the animal has a soul? If not, does she explain that the animal does not have a soul?
7. What is anthropomorphism? Given what science knows now about the consciousness of animals, is anthropomorphism a problem? If so, why?
8. What are the issues involved in collecting wild octopuses from the oceans and studying them in an aquarium?
9. Many cultures consume octopuses as food. Do you see any issues regarding eating octopuses?
10. For a book that imparts a wealth of scientific information about octopuses, Montgomery uses humor and also a deep sense of feeling and respect for the octopus and all of nature. How does Montgomery convey the major conservation issues, such as global warming and the health of the oceans, in the stories she tells in this book about people and animals?
11. Has your view of human consciousness changed after reading this account? Has your view of animal consciousness changed? What information specifically influenced you?
12. Has your perspective on nature and on octopuses been influenced by this book? What views has the book reinforced and what views has it changed your mind about?

Book Club in a Bag



"Journalistic immersion ... allows Montgomery to deliver a deeper understanding of the 'other,' thereby adding to our understanding of ourselves. A good book might illuminate something you knew little about, transform your world view, or move you in ways you didn't think possible. *The Soul of an Octopus* delivers on all three."

— New Scientist



The Soul of an Octopus: A Surprising Exploration into the Wonder of Consciousness

Summary

In this astonishing book from the author of the bestselling memoir *The Good Good Pig*, Sy Montgomery explores the emotional and physical world of the octopus — a surprisingly complex, intelligent, and spirited creature — and the remarkable connections it makes with humans.

Sy Montgomery's popular 2011 Orion magazine piece, *Deep Intellect*, about her friendship with a sensitive, sweet-natured octopus named Athena and the grief she felt at her death, went viral, indicating the widespread fascination with these mysterious, almost alien-like creatures.

Since then Sy has practiced true immersion journalism, from New England aquarium tanks to the reefs of French Polynesia and the Gulf of Mexico, pursuing these wild, solitary shape-shifters.

Octopuses have varied personalities and intelligence they show in myriad ways: endless trickery to escape enclosures and get food; jetting water playfully to bounce objects like balls; and evading caretakers by using a scoop net as a trampoline and running around the floor on eight arms.

But with a beak like a parrot, venom like a snake, and a tongue covered with teeth, how can such a being know anything? And what sort of thoughts could it think?

The intelligence of dogs, birds, and chimpanzees was only recently accepted by scientists, who now are establishing the intelligence of the octopus, watching them solve problems and deciphering the meaning of their color-changing camouflage techniques. Montgomery chronicles this growing appreciation of the octopus, but also tells a love story.

By turns funny, entertaining, touching, and profound, *The Soul of an Octopus* reveals what octopuses can teach us about consciousness and the meeting of two very different minds. (*From the publisher.*)



Sy Montgomery (source: LitLovers.com)

- Birth — February 7, 1958
- Where — Frankfurt, Germany
- Education — 3 B.A. degrees, Syracuse University USA
- Currently — lives in Hancock, New Hampshire, USA

Sy Montgomery is a naturalist, author and scriptwriter who writes for children as well as adults. She is author of more than 20 books, including *The Soul of an Octopus: A Surprising Exploration into the Wonder of Consciousness* (2015), which was a finalist for the 2015 National Book Award for Nonfiction and was a New York Times Bestseller. Her most popular book is *The Good Good Pig* (2007), the bestselling memoir of life with her pig, Christopher Hogwood.

Her other notable titles include *Journey of the Pink Dolphins*, *Spell of the Tiger*, and *Search for the Golden Moon Bear*. She has been described as “part Indiana Jones, part Emily Dickinson”.^[1] Her book for children, *Quest for the Tree Kangaroo: An Expedition to the Cloud Forest of New Guinea* was the recipient of the 2007 Orbis Pictus Award and was selected as an Honor book for the ALA Sibert Award.^[2]

For a half-hour National Geographic TV segment, she scripted and appeared in *Spell of the Tiger*, based on her book of that title. Also for National Geographic TV she developed and scripted *Mother Bear Man* based on the work of Ben Kilham, who raises and released orphaned black bears, which won a Chris Award. ^[3]

Author Vicki Croke asked Sy what she has learned, not just about an animal's natural history, but lessons about life. Sy answered: “How to be a good creature. How do you be compassionate? ... I think that animals teach compassion better than anything else and compassion doesn't necessarily just mean a little mouse with a sore foot and you try to fix it. It means getting yourself inside the mind and heart of someone else. Seeing someone's soul, looking for their truth. Animals teach you all of that and that's how you get compassion and heart.”